

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
BARRE CITY PLACE  
219 NORTH MAIN STREET  
CONFERENCE ROOM 1  
BARRE, VERMONT  
December 9, 2020**

**\*Meeting held by teleconference**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Carl Fowler Charlie Moore  
Chris Andreasson Joann Erenhouse  
Dave Wulfson Charles Hunter  
Rick Moulton Jeff Munger  
Art Whitman Charlie Baker  
Dave Allaire

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Joe Flynn, Secretary of Transportation  
Michele Boomhower, VTrans  
Dan Delabruere, VTrans  
Trini Brassard, VTrans  
Bob Atchinson, VTrans  
Paul Libby, VTrans  
Costa Pappis, VTrans  
Zoe Neaderland, VTrans  
Dave Pelletier, VTrans  
Eleni Churchill, VTrans  
Toni Clithero, VTrans  
Dan Currier, VTrans  
Karen Songhurst, VTrans  
Kyle Wells, VTrans  
Erin Charbonneau, VTrans  
Mark Fitzgerald, VTrans  
Jason Owen, VTrans  
Brian Savage, Legislature  
Diane Lanpher, Legislature  
Aaron Guyette, VHB  
Scott Burbank, VHB  
Jenn Conley, VHB  
John Wilson, Jacobs Engineering  
Tom Knight, Stantec  
Greg Edwards, Stantec  
Chris Saunders, Sen. Leahy's Office  
Erica Campbell, Sen. Sanders Office  
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak  
Christopher Natale, Amtrak  
Selden Houghton, VRS

Mary Anne Michaels, VRS  
Ashley Andrews, CVRPC  
Christopher Parker, VRAN  
Andreas Aeppli, Cambridge Systematics  
Christopher Lamm, Cambridge Systematics  
Brian Stewart, Cambridge Systematics  
Colin Bratton, WRC  
Devon Neary, Rutland Regional Planning Commission  
Shawna Kitzman, Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.  
Christine Forde, CCRPC  
Clint Richmond, MA Sierra Club  
Chris Rupe  
David Mullett  
Ben Heckscher  
William Gray  
Richard Lee  
Scott Bascom  
Ludwig Pulaski  
Bruce Nyquist

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### **1.0 Call to Order & Introductions**

Dan Delabruere called the teleconference meeting to order at 1:02 PM and explained the procedure to be followed.

### **2.0 Approval of Minutes**

*September 9, 2020*

**MOTION by Rick Moulton, SECOND by Carl Fowler, to approve the minutes of September 9, 2020 as presented. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

### **3.0 Passenger Topics**

*Ethan Allen Train to Burlington Update*

Dan Delabruere reported construction projects on the western corridor stayed on schedule with the Middlebury tunnel project being the most significant. Trains are running daily through Middlebury now. The Vergennes-Ferrisburg train station is substantially complete. The state is seeking a tenant (non-profit organization) for the Vergennes station that could also act as a station agent when Amtrak service resumes. Other projects on the western corridor include platforms (Burlington, Middlebury), track work (Pittsford bypass siding), injection points (soft subsurface), track surfacing (Burlington to Rutland), and bridge rehab (Charlotte). The design for the overnight location for the Amtrak train in Burlington is not yet complete. All the projects on the western corridor are hoped to be complete by December 2021 and ready for Amtrak service to Burlington by the first quarter of 2022.

Dave Wulfson asked if there is a schedule for Amtrak in Burlington. Dan Delabruere said there is a draft schedule showing a train leaving at 7 AM and returning at 7 PM. Carl Fowler suggested having an afternoon departure from NY to allow for morning business

in NY before heading back to Burlington. Also, the schedule should allow a connection to the national network in Albany. Dan Delabruere said the plan is to try to create the best schedule for daily service so there is not a different schedule each day.

#### *Burlington Platform/Rail Update*

Seldon Houghton, VRS, gave a presentation showing the work done by VRS on the Burlington station platform. The project entailed moving the bike path to the west and the track to the east, realigning track, and salvaging the historic canopy and pillars over the platform.

#### *Amtrak Service Suspension Update*

Secretary Joe Flynn reported the FY22 draft recommended Rail Budget has been forwarded to the Governor for consideration. The commitment to rail continues though suspension of Amtrak will be maintained due to COVID. All transportation services are experiencing a decrease in usage. The onset of the vaccine is a boost. The state expects to be in a different position by the end of March, early April, and is committed to having Amtrak service resume as soon as appropriate. VTTrans is sensitive to the ramifications of the suspension, but public safety and health are foremost.

Rick Moulton asked about flights out of Burlington Airport being down. Secretary Flynn said flights are down 9% from the previous week.

Carl Fowler urged announcing the restart of Amtrak service as early as possible in order to build demand and service. The latest news on CARES money is that the funding will preclude further Amtrak layoffs through March 31<sup>st</sup>. Secretary Flynn stated the COVID positivity rate will play into the equation as well.

Charlie Moore asked how long it will take to prepare for service to resume. Secretary Flynn said at one point Amtrak indicated up to 60 days would be needed. Dan Delabruere noted if qualified crews are maintained then the time to resume service will be lower. There are many variables.

Chris Andreasson mentioned inner-city bus service, noting MegaBus service to Burlington is suspended, there are Greyhound bus trips daily to White River Jct. from NY and to Springfield, MA, and Dartmouth Coach resumed service from Hanover/Lebanon, NH to Boston.

#### *Statewide Rail Plan Update*

A presentation was given on the update of the State Rail Plan and the State Freight Plan. The ridership forecast has a 20-year horizon. Rail scenarios for the Vermonter and Ethan Allen Express included connection to Montreal, increase in the number of daily trips, increase in travel speed, connection to Bennington, and connection to Burlington and Essex Junction. Growth and travel demand were investigated. The results show an increase in ridership when the connection to Montreal is made and daily service is increased.

The 2020 Rail Plan goals are basically the same as the goals stated in the 2015 Rail Plan. Potential initiatives include maintaining the existing system, expanding capacity for growth, increasing rail system use and funding, and increasing intermodal connections.

Dave Wulfson mentioned the need to factor in Amtrak trains (Class 3 track) when considering speed on the track. Also, CSX is buying PanAm which could change the prioritization for VRS and the state due to impact on freight patterns and rail service.

Chris Andreasson asked about the cost of the various options studied. Zoe Neaderland said cost will be shown in the Implementation Table. Brian Stewart said each initiative was scored and a cost qualifier (high/low) and feasibility factor were applied.

Charlie Baker asked about the deadline for comments and the end date for the final plan. Zoe Neaderland said there is a town hall scheduled on 12/17/20 to receive comments and the final draft of the plan will be available by the end of January 2021.

Carl Fowler mentioned the following:

- A Burlington-Essex Jct. train cannot run at 50 mph due to the track
- Requiring a bus shuttle for the Barre-Montpelier train will not work
- A second train is needed to Montreal

Dave Wulfson advised putting more thought into the Wacker train in Montpelier. A new main line on the other side of the river has been built to avoid repair of two bridges. The Little Wacker is expanding. A half mile of track is being added on the third switchback to get into the quarry so the volume of service can expand. Also, CSX is purchasing PanAm which owns Twin State Railroad from St. Johnsbury to Concord. Rail mapping is changing and this could be a more important line which the state does not want to lose so this should be included in the Rail Plan. Dan Delabruere said there are many variables, but the line should at least be mentioned as potential to prioritize at some point in time.

Chris Parker commented there is value in including a policy statement in the Rail Plan prioritizing connection from Vermont railroads to Class 1 railroads and regional markets.

Chris Andreasson asked if VTTrans has submitted comments on the CSX acquisition of PanAm. Trini Brassard said the state has not developed a position at this point, but if a filing for minor impact is done the state feels this is a significant transaction. Zoe Neaderland said inter-city passenger and freight rail must be addressed in the plan. Commuter rail is not included.

#### **4.0 Freight and Construction Topics**

##### *Project Updates*

Paul Libby reported on TIGER VII and BUILD grant projects including platforms, sidings, power switches on the western corridor, and 31 bridges, Rutland to Bennington, with three bridges in New York State. Year 2021 will be busy. There will be bridge work every year. Crossing improvements will be done in Rutland Town (Rte.3), Pittsford Depot Hill Road and Kendall Hill Road, Brandon Union Street, Norwich River Road, and

Burlington College Street. Other projects being done are additional crossings, runaround track, wye rehab, Bridge 59 rehab, 56 FEMA site repairs on the LVRT and MVRT, and the Amtrak platform and station in Vergennes.

Dave Wulfson mentioned the advance warning signals at the crossing in Florence which is on a truck route. The signals are a positive improvement. The same application would be beneficial elsewhere in the state.

### **5.0 Operation Lifesaver**

Toni Clithero reported Operation Lifesaver has moved to a virtual platform (Zoom) and is trying to make inroads on social media. The steering committee with representatives from the FRA, VRS, and Amtrak Police discuss strategy, updates, and problems occurring on the lines.

Dan Delabruere said an Operation Lifesaver campaign will be done for the western corridor to prepare people for the Ethan Allen train coming to Burlington.

Dave Wulfson mentioned mapping software (WAZE) is available that shows every grade crossing in the country.

### **6.0 Public Comment**

Carl Fowler spoke positively about the Brattleboro Station project and urged VTrans to give the Essex Junction station and platform attention. Mr. Fowler offered to do a slide show on rail at some point in time.

Clint Richmond, Massachusetts Sierra Club, spoke positively about extending Vermont services.

Charles Hunter mentioned the recent clearing of trees in the NECR right-of-way from Massachusetts to St. Albans using a helicopter. A grant from the FRA was received to fix rock slides and culverts. Amtrak and VTrans are to extend centralized control into the Brattleboro Station.

Ben Heckscher urged sharing meetings on the VTrans YouTube channel.

Dave Wulfson urged everyone to look for the “Celebration of Lights” train supported by the Governor and VTrans that is traversing the state during the holidays.

### **7.0 Next Meeting**

March 25, 2021 at 1 PM. Remote meeting.

### **8.0 Adjournment**

With no further business and without objection the meeting was adjourned at 3:07 PM.